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FUNDAMENTALS

BRIEF REPORT OF THE SPRINGFIELD MEETING

By George H. Browne,

The Browne and Nichols School, Cambridge, Mass.

If our Presidents will take sabbaticals during their term of office, they do well to leave behind, all planned, so successful a program as was carried out at Springfield on December ninth; and also to leave behind so worthy a successor as President Wm. C. Hill of the Central High School, Springfield, who, as chairman of the local committee, did so much to realize the full possibilities of Mr. Hitchcock's long-headed planning. May the success of this meeting be of good omen for the felicity and prosperity of our indefatigable co-worker's well-earned sojourn in jocund Japan.

If we had had Japanese weather, we should have had a bigger Springfield meeting than before; as it was, three or four hundred braved the rain and sleet, and, as *The Republican* prophesied, were well repaid. The following abstracts are but funeral bakemeats which coldly furnish forth the tables so sumptuously set in the sumptuous Commercial High School Hall. As before, the local committee provided an appetizing luncheon, and the Convention Bureau of the Springfield Board of Trade supplied the most elaborate printed program the Association has ever enjoyed.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LITERATURE

The first speaker of the morning was Mrs. Mary H. Dowd, head of the English department in the Manchester (N. H.) High School, who gave a paper on "The Fundamentals of Literature," or the What, the How, and the Why of Literature.

First discussing the question why literature should be studied in the high school, the speaker thought that it should be taken up for the purpose of developing and fostering in the pupil appreciation in three lines of relationship: first, appreciation of the beauty of the world in which he lives through the eyes of those who have "— caught splendor from the sailless sea and mystery from many stars outwatched;" second, appreciation of that other world of ideals, aims, and realities invisible to the eye of the body, but clear always to the eye of the soul from which the vision is not shut out through one's own or other's fault; third, appreciation of the responsibility that he and his fellows have before God in the ever-lengthening line of mortals struggling toward the light, and of the truth that neglect of this responsibility brings both personal degradation and national dishonor.

"This idea of the fundamental Why is simple enough," said Mrs. Dowd. "We are all, I fancy, agreed upon it. Selection of the fundamental What is not so easy. What would accomplish these ends in the hands of one teacher might utterly fail in the hands of another. What might suit my purpose this year might fall far short of it next year. All we can do, it seems to me, is with open minds to choose each year from the wealth of material available whatever we feel is for us, for our particular pupils, most likely to further the purposes we have in view."

Mrs. Dowd then proceeded to outline the course in literature as followed in the Manchester High School and to indicate in what spirit the books are studied.

"As to the fundamental How—into this question enters so largely the question of the teacher's personality that it is difficult to be specific. Few questions for content should be asked, but queries designed to send pupils over and over again to the text; to lead them to interpret what they read in the light of their own experience and observation; to discover for themselves the great elemental truths in literature and character; to see how the commonplace may be glorified by the light of a discerning soul; to weigh and question deeds in order to become independent thinkers; and to take a personal interest in current events, not in their mere passing as events but in their relation to the grave questions that underly theory of conduct and life."

Mrs. Dowd then took up, in turn, the various objections to literature studied for merely cultural purposes; to the

avoidance by pupils after they have left school of the so-called classics; and also to the present-day notion that the ephemeral interests of boys and girls are the only things to be considered in making out a program. To prove that this last should not be the primary consideration, Mrs. Dowd gave several instances from life of the influence of great masters upon the shaping of the future course of high school boys and girls. "The point is that though the *what* and the *how* are both important, the value of any *what* is largely dependent upon the *how*. Deliberate pursuit of such things for our own course as will of themselves command the interest of pupils is like the deliberate chase after happiness — the moment we attain what we had supposed could forever satisfy our desires, that moment we set our hearts upon something else. Why try to regulate our programs by a boy's shifting elusive interests? If ever there was a creature who wants a good deal here below and who wants but little long, it is the lad of high school age. Our anxiety should be not to make his work easy but to make it hard enough, direct enough, to develop the utmost — so far as literature can develop them — whatever gifts of mind and soul have been bestowed upon him. 'What gives pleasure is of little moment; what gives power and wisdom is all-important.' This is the unpopular view, I am well aware. But that pupils themselves often share it, I am sure."

In closing she said, "I hope I have emphasized the fact that in our arrangement of programs, our selection of books, we should refuse to be led by catch-words but be guided, each one of us, by what Emerson has somewhere called our 'private dream.' Having conceived our private dream, let us weave it of things excellent and of good repute and cultivate it with the enthusiasm glowing in our own souls so as to make the seed we sow leap to life in the love, the fear, the reverence, yea, in the poetry latent in every human soul with which we deal, if only it can be quickened."

"The fundamentals in literature, then, seem to me to be first, a well-defined purpose, our private dream; second, such selection of material, such choice of methods in presenting that material as shall foster in young hearts an appreciation of the two worlds, the seen and the unseen; as shall help them to find their place in the one in order that they may earn their place in the other; as shall lead them to appreciate the responsibilities of their generation, collectively and individually, for doing their part, as the

years go on, toward continuing and advancing the work of those who have gone before, in

“‘Opening the minds of coming men
To the starward reach and march of man.’”

FUNDAMENTALS OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION

Mr. C. H. Ward, of the Taft School, Watertown, Ct., speaking on the “Fundamentals of Written Composition,” thought that we had been led astray by a kind of madness from on high, a fine frenzy emanating from National advisers. The statement of the aims of high-school composition, as itemized by the National Joint Committee, “begins with the loftiest aim that any teacher can take—clear thinking—proceeds to the glorious purpose of inspiring others, drops down to a large vocabulary, flattens out in the dead level of such non-literary matters as handwriting and spelling, and then disappears down the hole of punctuation.” This kind of announcement, Mr. Ward thinks, has separated our high-school conception of English from the plain truth; and he adduced the testimony of the University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois, Harvard and Yale readers, Williams College instructors, business men, and editors, that “our job” is not to teach literary appreciation, literary self-expression, literary charm, literary persuasiveness, literary inspiration of readers, but some accurate knowledge of the rudiments. “Since illiteracy exists among our students, its eradication is our first concern.” What France thinks about orderly and accurate expression has been recorded for us in Professor Brown’s “How the French Boy Learns to Write,” and Mr. Ward quoted liberally from this excellent book to justify his insistence upon a restoration of emphasis upon the rudiments of accuracy.

“In the present status of education,” Mr. Ward concludes, “our task as English teachers, is to establish accuracy first. In spelling, in grammar, in punctuation, in organizing whole themes, we must root out childish ignorance and establish rudimentary knowledge.” In as many seconds as the exposition required minutes, Mr. Ward succinctly stated a few principles underlying efficient “campaigning” in each of the above, as follows:

SPELLING—1. Nearly all our troubles center in about 300 words, and in a dozen type-forms like *stor-i-es*, *Dicken-s-s’s*. Better results with 400 words than with 400,000!

2. It is harder to set up the habit of *tr-i-ed* than to teach a hundred words like *peripatetic*.

3. It is probably sound psychology to say that the *mental habit* of always being right with the common forms spreads its influence, without specific teaching, far into the 400,000.

4. A spelling test is very much more effective if the words are dictated in sentences.

GRAMMAR—1. Classifying *forms* is a futility, learning the *functions* of words is really useful as a foundation for composition.

2. Complex sentences cannot be understandingly constructed and pointed without a knowledge of clauses.

3. Clauses cannot be understood until the syntax of all the parts of speech is understood. That is the reason for Grammar.

PUNCTUATION—1. Though now despised and rejected of teachers, punctuation must in time become a chief reliance, for it is *the* great engine in teaching illiterate minds how to make sentences.

2. This engine is operated by exercises in unpunctuated sentences, either printed or dictated.

3. Punctuation can thus be made, not a matter of sticking in marks, but a matter of familiarity with sentence forms.

4. Punctuation has for its chief purpose the training in how to distinguish between a fraction of a sentence, a whole sentence, and two whole sentences.

PARAGRAPHING—1. A subject clouded and transmogrified by endless dissertations based on supposed knowledge of how authors make paragraphs.

2. As a matter of fact nobody — certainly not authors — knows much about the essence of a paragraph in literary structures of considerable dimensions; and if anybody did know, his information would not be of much avail in school use.

3. In school themes, a paragraph is simply one of three or four of the blocks into which the whole naturally divides in order to show a reader the changes in time or place, of characters introduced, or turn of the plot. Nothing but that. Why have we made such a mystery of this matter? Because we have been reasoning from Burke and Stevenson. It is time we attended to the simple facts of simple 300-word themes.

WHOLE THEMES—1. Paragraphs are the convenient units for charting the organization of a theme. An outline

of several headings and a dozen sub-headings corresponds to no facts of school composition under 1000-1500 words.

2. All shorter compositions are most usefully outlined by the presentation of a list of titles — mere brief titles—of the three or four natural divisions, represented by paragraphs.

3. A school paragraph is a progress in a straight line — straight in time or straight in place. It keeps straight in time without looping back: advances from one position to another without ever being in front of itself and doubling back. A school paragraph keeps us moving from where the preceding paragraph ended to where the next paragraph begins. That is the whole gospel.

4. "The French teacher saves himself almost immeasurably by the careful preparation he requires pupils to make before they begin writing. . . . Aside from the unmistakable influence that these pre-writing discussions have upon a pupil's habit of thought, they save the teacher an overwhelming amount of unnecessary labor."

In conclusion, Mr. Ward protested that insistence on accuracy never has made and never can make composition dull. "Dullness has only two possible causes: the nature of the pupil, the nature of the teacher. The right kind of teacher-nature will inspire, even if it insists on accuracy,—the wrong kind will not inspire, even if it despises accuracy. The wrong kind of pupil-nature cannot be trained to write charmingly; it can be usefully educated in carefulness. And the right kind of pupil-nature will be very much more persuasive and effective when it is not in the thrall of heedlessness and ignorance, but is free."

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ORAL COMPOSITION

On "The Fundamentals in the Teaching of Oral Composition," Mr. C. L. Hanson, of the Mechanic Arts High School, Boston, gave a lucid talk, of which any inexperienced reporter could have given an orderly summary.

Aims—"Every graduate of a Boston Elementary School should be able to stand before the class and talk clearly on some subject of personal, school, or public interest. The High School may well begin with a similar aim; but it should take more pains to insist on subject matter valuable to speaker and audience, coherent planning, fluent delivery, and careful attention to language, and also give the best speakers more opportunities to address the school." After suggesting that oral composition should

avoid some of the disadvantages as well as secure some important advantage of debates, which the speaker specified, he then took up the order of procedure to accomplish these aims in the following detail (in brief):

1. *Choice of Subject*—Begin with subjects which the pupil knows something about from experience—often more than we do, about many things — not the gist of an address, or the substance of a magazine article, but perhaps (as a warming-up exercise) the story of a book that has interested him, or a subject drawn from his other studies; but every teacher in the school should be a teacher of oral composition. We must get the pupil to give us only his own composition. One means of ensuring a wise choice of subject is to require of the pupil a brief Preliminary Note explaining and justifying his topic. (The speaker read specimens.)

2. *Topical Outline*—Simple, but useful; sometimes handed in several days beforehand, criticised by the teacher, and revised by the pupil. It should be orderly, logical, and easy to remember.

3. *Delivery*—The pupils must understand that they are not facing a mob or, like Beecher at Liverpool, hostile opposition, but, like members of a club, are engaged in a co-operative enterprise for mutual benefit. Means to this end:

(a) Introductory exercises,—i, informal talks on familiar topics, without knowing that they are talking; ii, team work in rows (e.g., on the book the class is reading), or in groups, (e.g., on successive courses of a dinner); iii, speakers allowed to stand where they please as first; iv, no criticisms at first—all comments encouraging, to prevent self-consciousness.

(b) Regular talks,—i, good speaker first, to set pace; ii, no topical outline in sight; iii, interruptions of speaker mostly for indistinctness, occasionally for position, never for solecisms or other misuse of language; iv, time allowance, 1—5 minutes each, at least five a year; time to say something worth while, to make a point clearly and convincingly; talks short enough to ensure the habit of speaking readily and to justify criticisms of the individual speaker.

4. *Questions on the Talk*—Readiness to answer any questions by the class helps determine attitude of speaker toward class and of class toward speaker, stimulates wise choice of subject, and encourages all to take the matter seriously.

5. *Discussion*—Criticism should be encouraging, if possible; stimulating always; friendly, yet as searching and vigorous as seems wise. After judicious praise, speaker will profit by unfavorable criticism. Discuss two or three talks at a time: point out distinctive features of each; expose worst faults; the pupil chairman often uses good judgment, for his turn soon. Write comments on topical outline, some of which read to the class, others privately; commend good diction; base drill on common errors. Committee of three pupil critics, with definite plan in hand, to pass judgment on carriage, choice of subject, subject matter, arrangement, delivery, language, etc.

6. *Grading*—Explain your scale; grade two or three talks at a time by committee of three, or by teacher, or by chairman, or by vote of class. If teacher doesn't agree, say so and why.

7. *Writing out the Talk* secures accuracy of statement and careful choice of words and phrases. Advantages of talking before writing: style less studied, simpler, more direct, better adapted to real life; delivery more pleasing, and a more reliable means of expression for some temperaments. (Personal examples).

Train the pupil to be at home on his feet, to think readily, to adapt himself to circumstances. A little in the way of present achievement may mean a good deal later. Teach the pupil rather than the subject.

DISCUSSION

The discussion was opened by Mr. Francis E. Regal of the *Springfield Republican*, and participated in by Mr. Browne, Mr. Edward H. Webster, of the Technical High School, Springfield, and by the program speakers, who answered clearly and convincingly several pertinent questions put to them from the floor.

THE TEACHER AND THE ART OF CRITICISM

After luncheon, Prof. Chauncy B. Tinker, of Yale, gave a charming address, reminiscent and consoling, on "The Teacher and the Art of Criticism." He began with a brief autobiographical contrast between the great big "America first" of today ["discovered by the Italian, settled by the Dutch and English, run by the Irish, and owned by the Hebrew"] and the typical New England village where he was born,—“into the XVII century, for the spirit of the XVII century lingered and moulded its

civilization. All were Americans — one great democratic family — with no social caste, except a contented superiority to the Irish. There was a church with many gilded crosses to which the maids repaired — a menace to the civilization of the village; and then there was the village church with its ethical primness and Calvinistic theology. Far away in Boston were people infected with the atheistic doctrines of the Unitarians; and there were many Catholics, too, in Boston! The village knew not the Italian. The Jew, I viewed with awe as emerged from the Old Testament, but mis-begotten. We had long prayers. There was much Bible reading; other reading, too, in the evenings, by father while mother sewed: *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Paradise Lost*, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, Whittier, Emerson (tainted with Boston heresy, but making good); Harper's Bazaar, Godey's Lady's Book, Mrs. Stowe, etc.

To-day, there are only a few sad traces of that life left. The old Meeting House is beautifully kept up as a valuable relique, with a young, up-to-date preacher. The Jew like Joseph of old, has taken over his father and children and children's children. The Italian has taken over the old farm. The heaven has failed to function! The provincial life and its literature are sunken and second rate. Poe and Whitman seem more American. America has discovered that it is not the world — only a microcosmogony; and as America has made that discovery, so we must discover a new criticism that is less provincial in tone and method than the old.

The 'national spirit' in our literature, about which we hear so much, is a feeble thing, not in touch with the real facts. English literature has always looked toward France and Italy, and they, with Spain, to the Middle Ages, thence to Latin and Greek literature. The literary history of Europe is the history of an interrelated net-work growth — of no national, but of one great international literature. The Irish are now trying to revive a national spirit in their national language; but it turns out to be by no means exclusively Celtic — it cannot divorce itself from international relations. Our criticism, therefore, must be projected upon a wider background.

When I began to teach, I could assume familiarity with some of the great classics. Phrases like "the topless towers of Ilion" were not phrases of a foreign language. Inevitably, as Shakespeare and Milton recede, the greater is the tendency to teach Shaw and Chesterton, to rely more

on the newspaper, the magazine, and the cinematograph. The 'new education' in the High School has discovered the uselessness of Greek for the Jew. Aeschylus and Plato having gone, logically much of English has got to go, too — Spenser, Milton, Dryden (Vergil), Pope (Homer) — into the limbo of authors much talked about by those who never read them. If Shakespeare is no fit reading for the Italian and the Jew, the most sublime passages in English literature must ever be unintelligible. How are we to apprehend and communicate the magic of words in passages like this in *Merchant of Venice*, (5, 1, 58, ff.,) beginning "Look how the floor of heaven Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold." View it against the background of wider relations. [Illuminating comment upon the wide connotation of Lorenzo's vocabulary; and the futility of graduate students' trying to become critics of Shelley and Keats, without knowing the masters of S. and K.; e.g., critics of Grecian Urn, Prometheus Unbound, Adonais, etc., without knowing Greek at first hand. The finest simile in the English language is a Platonic figure!] "If we are to keep our criticism true, we must continually refresh ourselves by going back to the source of all literature — not to the second aorist and the ethical dative, which leave out the heart of the matter. We must teach the Italian and the Jew "sophrosyne" and "spoude" — balance, control, restraint, respect for beauty, the symmetrical development of mind and body, the exaltation of art into a national passion. The 'Crown of Wild Olives' is at once worthless and priceless."

When Prof. Tinker reflected upon the galley slave life in the High School — the endless themes, report cards, etc. — and then upon the great work of judgment and meditation required of the critic, he was prompted to call his talk on the teacher and criticism "The Horrors of Being a Teacher" — "but," said he, I was forbidden. There are some things to which we do not refer. I wonder there are so many of us. I wonder there are so many of us here, with one abiding purpose — to get literature attended to, to get it down to the minds and hearts of men. We are the mediators. The great authors are immured in the citadel of quiet thought, and we must scale the heights. To know as critics, to communicate as teachers, is to live the happy life. It is to have life, and to have it more abundantly."

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